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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIJING 004231

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [CH](#) [IN](#)
SUBJECT: TIBET COMMUNIST PARTY FOUNDER DECRIES REJECTION OF
AUTONOMY PROPOSAL

REF: A. BEIJING 4196
[1](#)B. BEIJING 4168

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor
Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Phuntsok Wangyal (protect), the founder of the Tibetan Communist Party, decried the lack of progress in talks between Chinese officials and envoys of the Dalai Lama in a November 7 meeting with PolOff. The Chinese government, he argued, should not be so quick to denounce Tibetan proposals for autonomy as an attempt to achieve "covert independence." A high level of autonomy is perfectly consistent with the PRC Constitution, he said. Phuntsok Wangyal predicted that, despite the stalemated talks with China, Tibetan exiles will decide to maintain the Dalai Lama's "Middle Way" approach at their conference in India later this month. Conditions for Tibetans in China, he added, have become difficult since the March 14 riots, and discrimination against minorities reached new highs during the Olympic Games. End Summary.

Background

[1](#)2. (C) PolOff spoke November 7 with Tibetan Communist Party Founder Phuntsok Wangyal (protect), who is popularly known by the short form of his name, "Phunwang." As a young revolutionary, Phunwang assisted in China's "peaceful liberation" of Tibet and from 1951 to 1958 was the top Tibetan cadre in the region. Following the Tibetan uprising in 1959, Phunwang was imprisoned in solitary confinement in Beijing for 18 years for the crime of "local nationalism," a label given to ethnic minority leaders suspected of secretly plotting independence. After his release from jail, Phunwang was "rehabilitated" and he still receives some perks typical of high-level retired officials, including a government-appointed secretary. However, his outspokenness on Tibet makes him a sensitive person, as evidenced by the authorities desire to keep him out of Beijing during the Olympics (see para 6).

"Autonomy Does Not Equal Independence"

[1](#)3. (C) Phunwang expressed disappointment at the lack of progress made during the latest round of talks between the Communist Party's United Front Work Department (UFWD) and representatives of the Dalai Lama (reftels). He was especially critical of the Chinese side's outright rejection of the Tibetans' proposal for genuine autonomy. A high level of autonomy is possible under the Chinese Constitution,

Phunwang argued, and "autonomy" does not equal "independence." Phunwang criticized a November 6 press statement in which United Front Work Department (UFWD) head Du Qinglin, the chief PRC representative to the talks, denounced the Tibetan autonomy proposal by saying China would never accept "Tibet independence, half independence, or covert independence." "When you see statements like this," Phunwang said, "it is easy to tell which side is lying."

Written Language in Danger

¶4. (C) Phunwang said Tibet should enjoy stronger autonomy in areas such as education and language. While Tibetan youth can generally speak Tibetan, he observed, the written language is under threat because fewer and fewer Tibetans can read and write fluently.

Independence "Not an Issue"

¶5. (C) Phunwang told PolOff the majority of Tibetans want to see the Dalai Lama and the Chinese Government "come back together." Asked for his views on the conference of Tibetan exiles that will take place later this month in India, Phunwang predicted that the Tibetans will not give up the Dalai Lama's "Middle Way" approach, primarily because there is no alternative. Independence for Tibet is "simply not an issue." "It makes little sense to even debate

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independence since it is so clearly impossible." Most ethnic minorities, whether in China or elsewhere, wish to have their own independent state. Such sentiment is "natural" among minorities, Phunwang said, but it is unfeasible in the case of Tibet.

"Hard Time for Tibetans"

¶6. (C) Since the outbreak of widespread unrest in Tibetan areas of China in March, Phunwang said, "things have been hard for Tibetans." He criticized continuing discrimination faced by Tibetans and other minorities. As an example, he noted that Tibetans were excluded from most Beijing hotels during the Olympics. Phunwang revealed that he and his wife were forced to leave the capital during the Games. Phunwang said he recently wrote an extensive letter to President Hu Jintao regarding the situation in Tibet. Though unwilling to provide details of the letter to PolOff, Phunwang said the contents would be publicized in the near future.

RANDT